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ABSTRACT

On the premise that the aim of high school and college English teachers is to intensify students' powers of thinking and feeling and to keep themselves alive while doing so, this paper suggests numerous imaginative activities for use in the classroom. The activities include a Victorian panel discussion, a presentation of early English ballads, enjoyable ways to learn vocabulary, a "talk show" with authors from the Romantic Age, the study of literature of the supernatural and the witchcraft trials, and composition of an essay on values based on interviews with adults in three age groups. (CC)

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BASICS WITHOUT BOREDOM ? WITH IMAGINATION, YES !

by

Florence Hunter

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English (13th, San Antonio, Texas, February 2-4, 1978).

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Basics Without Boredom

My middle grandson, Bill, age nineteen, was helping me to staple the hand-outs for this workshop during the Christmas holidays, Noting several sheets that carried closing messages to my students such as, "Have a nice day!" or "Enjoy your weekend!" he remarked thoughtfully that while many of his teachers had said such things to him at the end of a class, none had ever greeted him with such encouragement at the beginning of one. I will, therefore, take a hint from Bill and extend to you my good wishes at the beginning of this hour.

Yesterday my husband and I observed our forty-third wedding anniversary--a significant milestone along life's pathway that we have traveled together. Today I celebrate with you a high-point in a briefer career--that of a Texas teacher of English, and that of a Texan by choice.

In 1968 I came to Texas from Boston, where I had been taught that that ancient place was the hub of the universe, only to find out what I had missed for over fifty years. Texas, I discovered, is the whole wheel! I have been made to feel a part of that wheel, despite my strange dialect, and that has made me glad. I am happy to be here.

The closest definition of what I do while teaching English I found in the Journal of the National Retired Teachers Association. (September/October, 1976). There in an autobiographical excerpt from a 1939 book by Mary Ellen Chase were the words which aptly describe my own more recent discoveries. Miss Chase was convinced that teaching English is at once the most difficult and the most enjoyable teaching in all the world. Reflecting every aspect of life itself, English encompasses literally everything within its limitless boundaries. Since no other field of study can be understood without it, our subject is often looked upon as education's servant rather than the head of its house.

Miss Chase, herself a teacher of English in college for many years, went on to say that she had known many excellent teachers of college English, but had "never discovered one who knew precisely what he was doing. Therein (she added) have lain their power and charm." The teacher of English who attempts to follow definite objectives and methods, according to Chase, will often not rise above the commonplace, and even may be "mediocre" at his job. So much in our teaching depends for its success upon the various imaginations of our students that it is no wonder our objectives must be "nebulous and intangible." We work with students who are widely different in their approaches to and perception of the literature they read, and the words they labor to write. It follows, therefore, that our methods must be equally different and varied.

The teachers of English must be flexible enough to make spontaneous and intelligent changes in approach, according to Chase, and this renders our subject more difficult to teach. "Our one aim," she suggests, "is to intensify the powers of thinking and of feeling in those whom we teach; and the only method we have of doing this is to open in countless ways, every possible avenue to thought, emotion, and expression, and to keep ourselves alive while we are doing so."

I try to keep myself alive while I teach twelfth grade English, and what I am about to tell you concerns some of my particular ways of doing just that. If a teacher is bored, it seems to me that she cannot help communicating her feelings to the students. My first rule, then, is to <u>enjoy myself</u>--to have fun. As Dr. Loban said in his talk to us yesterday, "We cannot afford not to enjoy the work we are doing. To miss joy is to miss everything." Hopefully that attitude will be contagious. I try to keep my teaching strategies varied and imaginative, sprinkled wherever possible with an ounce of humor. In fact, it seems easier to teach most things, including the <u>basics</u>, to someone who is smiling.

Basically we all aim at teaching students to read with comprehension, and to write with clarity, coherence, and emphasis. Moreover, since "expression is the dress of thought," we are concerned about the student thinking clearly, as well. Surely Mary Ellen Chase is correct when she says that our subject embraces "literally everything within its invisible and illimitable boundaries." Thus, as teachers of English we also need the wisdom and understanding of Solomon. In pursuit of such far-reaching objectives, therefore, we can often make good use of humor. Perhaps this is one reason why I invite imagination into my classroom to lend a helping hand.

Victorian Panel Discussion

After the many characteristics of the Victorian Age are explored in class, an article from a local newspaper is the starting point for a very lively panel discussion. In brief the article said:

A sixteen-year-old Texas girl was barred from all extra-curricular activities (for two years) after school officials discovered two (unopened) bottles of cherry-vodka in a hotel room which she shared with two other girls during a school orchestra trip. The girl, a straight-A honor student, had never before had discipline problems. Her room had been searched, and the vodka found, by the orchestra director and another school official after they used a pass-key to enter the girl's room without her knowledge or consent. She was sentenced to 30 days in a discipline center, and barred from all participation in the orchestra until her graduation. She was very upset.

I divide the class into two parts, and by drawing lots we determine which students will represent the "modern" point of view--that the punishment is too severe--and which the Victorian point of view. The Victorians feel that the punishment is not severe enough. Each student has to defend the side of the argument which he draws. The spontaneous discussions which usually follow are never dull, but sometimes they are more outstanding than others. Where there are a few lively imaginations in a class to act as a stimulous, the procedure can not only be educational, but highly entertaining as well. (A dittoed handout of one discussion is given to workshop participants. It was taken from notes made during

one such panel discussion.)

Early English Ballads

One of my students, an avid player of the guitar, presented a program for my classes last year. In this program he traced the relationship between the old English ballad and the modern ones. Calling himself an old English scop, he set some of the old ballads to music and, accompanied by another student, played and sang both old and new ballads. The segment which I am going to play today was taken from a tape-recording that I made that day. It begins with a brief dialogue between Pat and the teacher, and then goes right into the music.

Vocabulary

The intermarriage of English with other languages has produced a rich and dynamic vocabulary, and yet the majority of our students find little excitement in increasing their word usage. Perhaps the young have been too busy coining expressions of their own to concentrate on the wealth available in a standard dictionary. It is not enough, at any rate, to assign twenty words to be looked up, memorized, and dutifully used in sentences. Far too often the "learning" gained from such perfunctory tasks is forgotten before a week has passed.

Possibly it was because I wanted to enjoy every aspect of my teaching experience that I began several years ago to devise a light-hearted and sometimes humorous approach to this mundane task. Consequently, on Vocabulary Day in my classes we now play with the new words (after we are introduced to them) until they are our friends. After all, it is difficult to forget a friend! If a teacher has an active imagination, I believe that she can make vocabulary day a high-point in the week. This system does work. It helps the slow student, and is enjoyed by the bright one. It is also readily adaptable to any age or

grade level. The handouts are self-explanatory and contain random samples from my files. (The nineteen-page handout will not reproduce, but a number of samples will follow this page.)

The following are general rules which are my guidelines:

A handout sheet is prepared for each week, and it is divided into three major parts:

Part I: The student is to look up 15-20 words on the given list, and write the definitions and parts of spech for all of them.

Part II: I write ten or fifteen statements or questions using the words from the list. (Whenever possible I use humor or whimsy.) The students may answer, comment on, or paraphrase these statements or questions. This section gives the student practice in recognizing and understanding the words, but it also serves as a model in usage.

Part III: The sudent is now to use the words himself to ask the teacher questions, (she will answer these briefly when she grades the paper) to make statements, or to write an original story. He has a choice, but he must use all the words, and must underline them.

When grading these papers, it is not necessary to check the definitions unless something in Parts II or III directs one to do so.

I often use the names of current students, administrators, librarians, counselors, or my own name in Part II. I am, however, careful not to attach derogatory or ridiculous words to students' names, or (God forbid!) to the names of the administrators or other school personnel either. For example, I have no absurd, vicious, nor freakish students, but I do have, among other things, a scatterbrained elf, a precocious lion, a sarcastic elephant, an irrational cat, and a grotesque gazelle. Part II also works to discover whether the readers can understand the words in a given context, and the context, it seems to me, may as well be amusing as dull.

Once when I was requiring paraphrases of statements in Part II, I discovered that the teacher needed to supplement the dictionary occasionally. I had a sentence which read: "An earnest student ought to redeem himself when he does

Vocabulary V Jonathan Swift

Part I: Look up and state the definition and part of speech for each of the following:

harmonious	ignorance	bitterness	devastating	elf
sensitive	disparity	distinguished	scatterbrained	
corruption	frustrated	disillusioned	vivid	

Part II: Answer the following if they are questions, or comment on any statements that are made:

1. Everything in Room 221 was harmonious last week when Helen walked in bringing a scatterbrained elf with her.(Why on earth would she do a thing like that?)

2. Hugh and Doug exchanged glances before Doug said, "What do you mean by bringing a being of such ignorance into Mrs. Hunter's harmonious class?" Was he justified in asking Helen such a question? Defend your answer.

3. Jeff, who is a distinguished scholar, according to Paul, was frustrated by Doug's remark, probably because he wanted to get acquainted with the elf. Why would a scholar want to become friendly with such a creature?

4. Julie, a sensitive student, who is never scatterbrained, said quietly, "I believe that Mr. Laceky and Mr. Shaw would get a very vivid picture of how Mrs. Hunter teaches English if they were to stop here for a visit today." (What would they be likely to say--these principals--if they did visit us today?)

5. With some bitterness Janice told Charlie, "I wish that Helen had brought a kitten instead of an elf. I like cats, and I once knew a devastatingly beautiful one who could talk." (If you believe her, defend your answer.)

6. "There is some disparity between the various attitudes of the teacher," thought Bridgett. "Why is she insistant upon a quiet classroom when she will allow an uninvited elf to cause so much commotion?" Defend the teacher's position in this case.

7. "There is so much corruption in modern times," said Angella, "that I don't see what difference it makes if Helen brings an elf to class. Is he a moral and a religious elf?" What did Helen reply?

8. "Don't answer that," said Cynthia, "I know that Angella will say that your answer is devastating. Next week I am going to bring a large black cow to class." Will she?

9. Helen, by this time, was very disillusioned as she turned to Rhonda and said, "Does Cynthia expect to milk that cow in this room? If so, I predict that she will become very frustrated."

10. All of the students laughed as they watched the scatterbrained elf climb on top of Helen's English book and peer into it. "Such ignorance," said Wendolyne, "that elf will become disillusioned when he finds that there is no elf literature in that book" Was she correct on both counts? Explain fully.

11. "I didn't bring him here to read," said Helen with some bitterness, "I brought him here to help me with my vocabulary sheet. He is, furthermore, one of the most important characters from Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels." Explain who the elf really was.

Part III: Using all of the words from tha above list, write ten imaginative questions for the teacher to answer.

Have a nice day!

Lit. IV

Vocabulary V John Milton (5b)

Part I: Look up and state the definition and part of speech for each of the following:

accomplished	idealized	loftiness	obscurity	scholarly
cultured	indignities	masque	reprisals	stimulating
dedicated	literary pursuits	mythological	scathing criticism	temperance

Part II Answer the following questions, giving reasons if answer is "yes" or "no":

1. Name the most cultured person that you know. In what ways is he cultured?

2. What was the subject of the most stimulating discussion which you can remember?

3. What was the most difficult thing which you have ever accomplished? How did you accomplish it?

4. Name some dedicated person at BCP. In what way is he dedicated and how does he show it?

5. What is a masque, and in what high school course would a masque take place?

6. Name some mythological being and explain what makes it mythological.

7. In what way is the statement, "Every person is created equal" an idealized statement? Is the statement a true one?

8. Do we ever idealize anyone whom we like, or love? Is it sensible to idealize people?

9. Name two ways that you feel we should all practice temperance, and how should we do it?

10. To whom have you ever used scathing criticism and for what reason? Has anyone ever used scathing criticism on you? Did you deserve it?

11. Who is the most scholarly person that you know? Would you like to be scholarly? Why?

12. Name some literary pursuits that a scholarly person would have.

13. What kind of indignities would you like to avoid? Do groups of people ever suffer indignities? What kinds?(of indignities)

14. If you are not a dedicated student will the teacher use any reprisals against you? Why, why not or what kind?

15. List the qualities a person would have if he were going to end his life in obscurity.

16. Which person in this classroom would find something stimulating in the loftiness of literary pursuits?

17. What goal in life would seem to have the most loftiness in your opinion? Which goal would lead to obscurity?

Part III: Use all the words and expressions in the usual way (in a scholarly manner.)

I'm glad you are in my class! Happy Valentines Day or Joyous January

By special request of Period 6

Special Vocabulary (5c)
College Level

Part I: Look up and state the definition and part of speech for each of the following:

Part III: Use 10 of the words to ask the teacher questions:

adherence	contingent	implicitly	inconclusive	introspection
admonish	decadent	cajole	indolence	intuitive
cajole	foible	civility	indubitable	
civility				

Part II: Answer the following:

1. For what reason, in your opinion, should John be admonished? & For what reason has anyone ever admonished you? Have you ever admonished anyone? Why?

2. The adherence of Bruce and Randy to what cause was evident in October and early November, 1976? Those who were not in 221 in October, may ask Scot.

3. Is Johnny noted for his adherence to school precepts? Defend your answer.

4. Do you think we could cajole Michael into washing and waxing the floor in 221?

5. When was the last time you tried to cajole someone to do something? Did you succeed?

6. Is Jim noted for his civility in his English class? Are you also?

7. If Melinda gets an A in here, it will be contingent upon what?

8. What does it mean to be a contingent beneficiary on someone's insurance policy?

9. Has Randy any foibles that you are aware of? Name two, if possible.

10. Does Patti think that society is getting decadent? (Ask her.) Do you? Defend your answer

11. Debra's announcement to Craig Robinson was made implicitly. What do you think she said?

12. Was Craig Clark's report on the Lawyer in the Canterbury Tales inconclusive or not? Why?

13. Is it an indubitable fact that Clayton felt friendly toward the Summoner? Explain.

14. Has Jay ever shown any indolence in this English class? Have you? Has anyone? Who?

15. When is it proper to be indolent?

16. Who shows more evidence of introspection, Pam or Patti (Patti)? Defend your answer. Are you introspective? Is is a good quality to be introspective?

17. If I said Rosemary was intuitive would I be complimenting her or criticizing her? Is Rosemary intuitive?

18. Scot is indubitably a person of introspection and civility, while Randy admonishes the teacher for her foibles. On the other hand, Bruce feels that doing English work should be contingent upon the mood he is in at the moment. Fortunately Jim adheres to all the rules implicitly and does all his cajoling with great civility. Michael, John, Rosemary, and Jay are not sure that the teacher should show more civility to the (just named) remnant of last trimester's 6th period class than she does to them, since they also represent remnants of other classes which met in 221 last trimester. Debra, the 2 Clarks, Johnny, Clayton, Melinda, Patti and Pam, however, say that they have an intuitive feeling that everyone is welcome in here. Comment on this long-winded statement with civility, if possible.

Part III: Use the words to ask the teacher a series of questions.

English III Vocabulary 28 The Leopard in Period 7 1974

Part I: Look up and state the definition and part of speech for each of the following:

jaunty	laborious	laughable	levity	
jocular	lament	legacy	limited	magnificent
jubilant	laudable	leopard	limitation	

Part II: Paraphrase or comment on all of the following imaginative happenings;

1. A magnificent leopard was sitting in Helen's seat in 104 on Monday.

2. The whole class lamented the fact that Helen had no place to sit. Clifton told the leopard to go to Mr. Cavenall's biology class where he might be more welcome.

3. Brenda thought it was laughable to hear Clifton order a leopard to leave.

4. In his usual jaunty manner, Ronald made some jocular remarks to the leopard who ignored him.

5. Janice was jubilant when she discovered that the leopard could speak French. (She said, "Bon jour," to him and he shook hands with her.)

6. Elizabeth noticed the levity of her classmates when she came in late, but she paid only a limited amount of attention to the leopard, who was busy doing a vocabulary paper in French.

7. "What is a legacy?" asked the leopard when Beverly asked him to move out of Helen's seat. "It is something that you inherit from a person if you are mentioned in his will," said Linda. (It was laudable of her to answer so quickly.)

8. Mrs. Hunter said that she hoped that everyone would enjoy the legacy of good vocabulary words which she will leave for her classes each Friday. "I'd rather have something to eat," said the leopard, and Lawrance gave him some soul food.

9. "Wasn't it laudable for Lawrance to feed the leopard?" asked Reginal, as the class laughed with great levity.

10. Samual lamented the fact that Mrs. Hunter asked him to take the leopard to the cafeteria for lunch. "It will be too laborious a task," he said, "and besides the leopard might eat me for lunch."

Part III: Use all of the words on the list and write something imaginative for the teacher to read. Use all the words correctly. Levity will be appreciated.

wrong, in order not to upset his mother." I thought the words in question--earnest, redeem, and upset-- were very simple ones until I received several interesting interpretations. One went: "A serious student ought to buy himself back from a pawn shop when he does wrong in order not to turn upside down his mother." At least he did not go astray on the word earnest.

As a method of communication with the teacher, Part III serves a functional purpose, and offers an opportunity to ask further questions about words which still seem unclear. Many students utilize this section to ask questions which have no relationship to the vocabulary study, but seem important to the questioner.

A vocabulary paper, quite different from the usual, evolved from a class discussion of the changing English language. I had asked the students for lists of the latest black slang words (I was then teaching at an all-Black school) and I incorporated them into a slang version of Beowulf. This "masterpiece" was far more popular than the original had been, earlier that week, despite the fact that I required the students to translate the slang version into formal standard English. (A copy of this version and a slang vocabulary list follow this page.)

Romantic Talk Show

A course which is in reality set up to contrast the eighteenth century and the Romantic Age is called Romanticism and is an elective. Early in this twelve-week class I assign each student an author from these time periods on which to compile a bibliography. Then, instead of requiring a term paper (usually a temptation inviting plagiarism) I have each student research his character thoroughly enough to become his person on a Talk Show. The teacher interviews (and tape-records) the students on the Talk Show, as each uses his imagination to depict the actual facts of the assigned literary figure's life, or to answer questions in a manner his author might have done.

Jive cat (noun) a fraud; big shot; thinks he's good

jive turkey (n) a worse fraud; a person "not for real" or someone whose peers disapprove of troublesome person; thinks he knows everything; a sorry chick

to jive (v) to do any of the things that makes one be a jive cat or turkey

flake off (v) to leave; quit; stop

chilly--cool, but not in temperature. (A compliment)(an adjective in most cases) bold

to be chilly--to do one's best

freak out--act crazy; let someone down; to act the fool (also freak off)

dude--guy; man; "cat"

a ride and a half (N) a fancy car

dab--a black handshake of a special kind

cold--very nice in personality or looks; cold dudes--super "bad" (good) men

cold rags--very nice clothes

cold bleeded or cold blooded--intelligent; extraordinary; out of the ordinary in a good sense; "real" smart; egotistical; bold; glad.
bigstuff--someone who thinks he is great; important; "something else"

crib--a person's house

decked down--dressed up fancy
sharp--fine, neat, etc.
skintights--tight pants
cold threads--nice clothes; fashionable clothes
floods--pants that are too short. (Also called "highwaters") Short enough so that they would not get wet in a flood.
let's dice--Let's go: let's get out of here
skying--leaving in a hurry
no stuff--no kidding; I really mean it; it's the truth; no lie
all fired up--feeling your best; hot; mad; raring to go; ready
mighty-mighty--something strong; someone strong; "real together"
Daddy Cool Breeze--courageous person; a very special person; he is all right
pad--house; apartment
bad--good
helpful cold dudes--willing a ready men
heat--a gun; a weapon
gig--a party
real together--has connotations of approval. Mrs. Hunter was "real together" and had genuine "soul" when she rewrote "Beowulf."
soul brother--a black person

Words and definitions supplied by 11th and 12th grade students at Charlton-Pollard High School in Beaumont, Texas. This all Black school has since been closed.

BEOWULF

This English primary epic is retold in modern Black slang to illustrate the changing English language. (The slang words used here were in use in 1974, and some of them are already outdated.)The assignment: Rewrite this in standard English.

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There was once this cold blooded Swedish dude called Beowulf who did not dig what was happenin' in Denmark. Some jive cat named Grendel was invading King Hrothgar's land of the Danes, and with his big mouth was eating up the Danish dudes at a very fast rate. Nothing would make him flake off. Beowulf got fourteen other Swedish dudes together and they decided to check it out. His mother was believed to have said, "More power to you," when she heard of the plan.

Beowulf replied to his mother, as he looked at his Mickey Mouse, "Thank you mother, but give me a dab before I leave. It will give me the courage to be chilly."

"Right on, my son," she said as he set out with his fourteen hip companions in a Viking boat to solve the problems of Hrothgar. They had a ride and a half in that there boat!

To tell the truth, Hrothgar was so surprised at the arrival of fifteen helpful, cold dudes that he was suspicious as to why they had really come. "You freakin' off or something," he asked, "that you would want to fight a bigstuff monster like Grendel? He eats soulbrothers whenever he gets the chance."

"Oh, let me do my thing," said Beowulf to the Man, "I didn't get decked down in these sharp skintights just to go for a boat ride. I mean to slay me a monster and then go buy some cold threads before I sail home.

That night Grendel crept out of his pad just after all the Danes got drunk at a gig. He was dressed in floods but he carried no heat, (His high waters were wringing wet.) First thing he did was to grab a sleeping Dane and he said, "Let's dice," as he ate him up just like the wolf ate Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother. Next he grabbed the sharp looking Beowulf, who without delay proceede to pull out the arm of the foul monster. Grendel, whom even God cursed, went skying home through the water to bleed to death. He was a chump, sure enough, even after he was dead.

The Swedes and the Danes had big fun at a party (no stuff) to celebrate Beowulf's victory. Hrothgar showed his appreciation by giving the hero a gold ring. It looked neat on the sharp looking Sea-Geat, who had on his cold rags. He ate the feast lustily because he was hungry like a dog, and had the munchies. Indeed, the dude was all fired up! (No stuff!)

But they celebrated too soon! Grendel's mother (also all fired up) came out of her crib to avenge her son's death. She took Beowulf on a trip down into her underwater cave to tell him what it is. She was some jive turkey (I do believe) but Beowulf was dynamite and mighty-mighty. He said to himself, "Hang in there baby,"as he hit Grendel's mother in the throat with a sword. After a fierce battle, she was one dead broad, and Beowulf, all cold bleeded, swam up through the water to where his friends were waiting. He carried the dead monster's foul head with him as evidence of a neat victory.

(The words were supplied by students in the 11th and 12th grades.)

Florence Hunter
Beaumont-Charlton-Pollard High School
Beaumont, Texas

In one Talk Show, by student request, we resurrected some of the eighteenth-century writers, and had them arrive straight from heaven to point fingers of scorn at the Romantics. "In heaven," said Samuel Johnson, (in answer to the question, "What language do they speak in heaven?") "we speak English, of course--and very proper English, at that."

In between the interviews, we have humorous commercials, written by the students and their teacher, and read by students not scheduled for the program that day. These commercials are written in the modern way, and are often satires (fitting for the eighteenth century) of what we hear all too often on our airways. However, they concern actual goods or services available, or attitudes prevalent in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries in England. I would like to read you a sample or two of these original commercials.

Romantic Ale

Cornwall Breweries wish to announce their latest brew, Romantic English Ale. This ale, taken internally, can make your world glow and sparkle, your speech glitter, and your feet dance more gracefully. Serve Cornwall Ale and Beer at your next party, and see what a successful affair it will be. The best orators in the House of Lords drink Romantic Ale before making speeches, and the listeners hear more interesting things after drinking a mug or two.

Fresh Meat

The best mutton in the land is grown by the Duke of Devonshire, and some of it is being sold at Jiffy's Market in Winchester. Contrary to what you have often heard, this mutton is pure mutton and has no physial ailment, except that it is dead. We have carefully killed only widow sheep for market, as they were unhappy anyhow and had nothing to lose. All of the mother sheep are busy raising large families for next year's table.

Education

Send your son to Glasgow or to Edinburgh for his education if you want him to succeed in life financially. Only in a forward-looking Scottish University will the young man be trained in chemistry and engineering. In these modern times Greek and Latin, the mainstays of Oxford and Cambridge, are no longer needed. More men are working in the chemical and glass industries than are slaving away as parish priests. Make your son rich--not religious, and his name will be remembered long after he is gone. (And he will have more fun while he is alive, as well.)

Literature of the Supernatural and the Witchcraft Trials

Perhaps the most popular of all my present courses is a twelve-week class in the Literature of the Supernatural. When I was given this course (with two day's notice and no textbook) I frantically searched my materials for a place to start. We began with a book which all my students own--the Bible--and each class member presented an oral report on one of the Biblical miracles drawn from the Old and New Testaments. I was amazed by the student interest in the old narratives, and although we eventually did get books of Supernatural Literature, the times we have spent on the supernatural elements in the Bible have proved to be the most rewarding. When the classes requested that I invite clergymen from the different faiths to come and explain the various interpretations, I sought and received permission from school administrators for such resource volunteers, on condition that there be no indoctrination. Subsequently, we had Catholic Priests, Rabbis, and Protestant preachers visit our classes.

Later we studied witchcraft, including its history in Europe and America, as well as modern accounts, both pro and con. Then, as a culmination to the subject, and to show the irrational beliefs in the seventeenth century, we held a mock witchcraft trial. I have tape-recorded six of these trials, and each one is completely different from any other. I appoint a judge, two lawyers, witnesses for both sides, and a jury. Those who take the parts of witches are volunteers. It is pointed out to the students that the fabricated testimony of our "witnesses" is no more fantastic than that which was used to convict nineteen persons in Salem, Massachusetts in the seventeenth century. I now wish to play a short segment on tape from one of our trials.. . .

The excerpt played included the spontaneous and unrehearsed testimony of Mrs. Lotta Sounde (wife of the town crier, Mr. Resonant Sounde) who accused the "witch"

of causing the Sounde's bell to crack. To add insult to injury, this dire deed made it necessary for Mrs. Sounde to use her "egg money," set aside for a whole year to buy a new Bible, to purchase a new bell. Even the defense lawyer's suggestion, that Mrs. Sounde's voice was so loud that it could easily substitute for the bell, did not cause her testimony to waver.

Mr. I. M. Sure, also unrehearsed, offered conclusive evidence that Miss Caster Spell (the defendant) was certainly no witch. Quoting chapter and verse from the Bible, Mr. Sure said that "we should not judge one another any more," and that what we were doing to Miss Spell was wrong. "If she is a witch," he said, "then she certainly must be wicked. Furthermore, the Bible says, 'the wicked shall perish.' If you will look over there at Miss Spell, you will see that she is very much alive, and if she were a witch she would have perished long ago." Despite the prosecution's interjection that if the defendant were convicted she would perish, the jury rendered a verdict of "not guilty," and Miss Spell was acquited.

Close to the end of the twelve weeks I use a five-lesson unit from Pattern of Healthful Living (a human relations concept funded by the Texas Commission on Alcoholism and Drugs to improve self esteem.) The unit is called, "To Question or Not to Question," and it begins with a fake ESP experiment. After the experiment, which usually succeeds in fooling the students, the class is let into the secret of how easily people are fooled. The purpose of using these lessons is to keep the students' feet on the ground, to keep some helpful balance in the course, and to develop healthy, questioning, and inquiring minds.

The Joy of Composition

Persuading those healthy and inquiring minds that the idea of writing compositions is a joy is not easy. Confronted with a writing assignment, the healthy minds draw a blank, and when there is nothing meaningful to write about, disenchantment sets in,

joy flies out the window, and the teacher is in a bind. It is now expedient, I find, to set the classes busy gathering their own information on which to write a paper. Nevertheless, their investigation for a human values research project is not to be done in the library, for this is to be a personal task of information gathering. Each researcher is provided with a list of questions concerning life goals, personal values such as are to be found in politics, religion, education, marriage, a person's public heroes, his ideas of modern invention, progress and happiness. The student is then told to find an elderly person (60-85 years), a middle aged person (25-50), and a young worker (25-30),who are willing to be interviewed. He is to record the answers that each one gives to the questions, and when finished he is to answer the same questions himself.

The results of the interviews are brought back on a given day and a correlation of all information from five classes is written on a series of blackboards around the room. Discussions covering the similarities and differences between the ideas held by the various generations are lively and informative. It goes without saying that the teacher (past 60 herself) acts as a catalyst in the evaluation of the collective data. Now armed with a wealth of information which they helped to gather and interpret, together with a list of suggested subjects, the students are ready to write their human values essay. This assignment is generally done with interest and enthusiasm, and is worth the effort that the procedure entails.

One success, of course, makes a teacher hungry for another. Would I have another, I wondered, when time was running short and I wanted my students to master both persuasive and descriptive writing before the holidays? If both characteristics could be combined in one assignment, it certainly would cut down on my tremendous reading chores as well as show that often a combination of writing methods are used in many written pieces. When my husband suggested an Eskimo, I knew my problem was solved. The subsequent assignment read: Write a

letter to an Eskimo,(Mr. S. Kimo) and persuade him to move to Beaumont, Texas, by describing the place accurately to him. That set of compositions by young people, who knew it and loved it well, was a wonderful tribute to their city. Surely Mr. Kimo, wherever he is, will be persuaded. One girl, moreover, had a unique argument. She suggested that in Beaumont, Mr. Kimo would have less time to worry about his daughter when she goes out in the evening. "Our nights," she wrote, "are not six months long."

The last composition of the trimester was an adventure into the real world of written communication. My eighty-year-old father, who lives in Massachusetts, is not an Eskimo, but he has been snowbound in his house all winter. He has an alert mind, a very attentive memory, and strong opinions. I chose one class of thirty members to write friendly letters to him, and assigned each one a different topic to discuss, (the letters to be interesting must have variety) and certain kinds of questions to ask or information to request. Of course I told the class something about my father including the fact that he would answer their letters, and gave permission for each one to write anything else he wished in addition to the initial subjects and questions. Although I made no actual corrections on the letters, I read them carefully, and recorded a grade for each before (one or two at a time) I mailed them. The letters were interesting and well-written, and what is more, the young people enjoyed writing something to a real person. It was an assignment with purpose. Needless to say, my father was delighted to receive so much mail from his new friends, and his replies are arriving daily and being delivered all over Beaumont. Composition is a great deal of work, especially for the teacher, but when once in awhile something goes well, the joy is also very great.

If there is any continuity in my rambling thoughts, it comes from the moments of pleasure that I receive when a student will admit that,now and then,English is interesting. Bill said that it was the best class he had all year, and that each

day he "looked forward to a class where the teacher is organized but not stereotyped." Patty liked the variation, and Denise remarked that the ways I used were best for a student who thinks he can't learn." Dorothy learned things she "didn't know (she) was learning," and Theresa said that the vocabulary papers increased one's understanding more than memorizing definitions did. Someone named "Anonymous" left a note on my desk on the last day of school that said, "This has to be the most interesting English class I have ever entered. Keep using that wild imagination of yours."